**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**



**How the Other Half Lives Assignment**

(<http://www.authentichistory.com/1898-1913/2-progressivism/2-riis/index.html>)

This pioneering work of photojournalism by Jacob Riis focused on the plight of the poor in the Lower East Side, and greatly influenced future "muckraking" journalism. Riis mostly attributed the plight of the poor to environmental conditions, but he also divided the poor into two categories: deserving of assistance (mostly women and children) and undeserving (mostly the unemployed and intractably criminal). He wrote with prejudice about Jews, Italians, and Irish, and he stopped short of calling for government intervention. Still, the catalyst of his work was a genuine sympathy for his subjects, and his work shocked many New Yorkers.

**Introduction:**

1. According to Riis, why was it that “one half of the world does not know how the other half lives”? What two “events” (one socially based, one naturally based) usually forced the upper half to pay attention to the plight of the other half?
2. Why do you think Riis decided to “reveal” this world to his readers by writing this book?
3. Who is to blame for the situation in the tenements according to Riis? Do you agree with this sentiment or not? Explain.

**Chapter 1:**

1. Because tenants had to pay high rents to cover damage and abuse in advance, how did it change their mindset on how they treated the property? What were the two reasons why the owners didn’t maintain their properties, according to Riis? (Think about the conditions of the bathrooms in our school)
2. As more people moved to the city, most owners modified their properties in order to meet the demand. Provide a list of options a tenement owner had to improve the earning potential of their property (continue to add to the list as you continue to read this chapter).
3. What was the purpose of Riis describing the three instances of tenement-house living conditions in “modified” rooms? Was it effective? Do you think it was true? Why or why not?
4. What do you think would be worse – living in a sub-divided attic or sub-divided basement? Why?

**Chapter 2:**

1. The Tenement-House Act of 1867 ordered tenement owners to install windows into their apartments. Why did both the owners and the tenement dwellers express opposition to these safety/health improvements?
2. According to that same law, what was a tenement defined as? How are they different from apartments or flats?

**Chapter 3:**

1. Although Riis makes light of the lack of “native” New Yorkers in Manhattan, where do you think they went? Who filled the void of ownership and control of that area of town when the WASPs left?
2. What was the powerful argument about that status of immigrants does Riis make when talking about the newfound power that the Irish and Germans in the 1870s – a generation after they arrived in the United States?
3. The “industrious” immigrants (those who have purpose or ambition) typically started in the tenements and then moved out once they became successful in their businesses. According to Riis, what type of businesses belonged to the Italians, Irish and Chinese?

**Pick one ethnic group in order to answer the following questions below:**

Italians (Chapter 5) / Chinese (Chapter 9) / Jews[[1]](#footnote--1) (Chapter 10) /

Bohemians[[2]](#footnote-0) (Chapter 12) / African-Americans (Chapter 13)

* What type of tenant are they?
* What jobs do they usually do?
* What are their dealings with the police?
* Special problems/domestic issues?
* Riis believes they are both (insert positive adjective) and (insert negative adjective).

In Chapter 11, Riis goes in-depth in describing the garment industry in New York and talks about the workers (or “sweaters”) who made clothing there. From that term, the conditions that the “sweaters” worked in later became known as “sweatshops”. After you read the chapter, **summarize it acrostically using the term “sweatshop” as your focal word.**

This industry will be discussed further in the Tenement Museum and later on this unit when we talk about Progressive Reforms and the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.

1. Jews typically came from Poland or Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. Bohemians are a catchall term. Today people from that region would be known as Czechs or Slavs. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)